

CENTER FOR GENDER & REFUGEE STUDIES

GUATEMALA “FEMICIDE” ARTICLES

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ARTICLES ONLINE:

Murderers prey on Guatemalan Women, BBC News

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3294659.stm>

Jane Fonda visits Guatemala to put spotlight on murders of women in Guatemala.

<http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/press/media/0312081>

The Americas: It's time to put an end to violence against women. Amnesty International.

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR010132003?open&of=ENG-GTMckissues/0401301>

United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Gender Profile of the Conflict in Guatemala*

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org/guatemala/guatemala.htm#unifem>

To: Karen Musalo

From: Emily Blistein

Re: **Synopsis of articles addressing the killing of women in Guatemala**

Date: October 5th, 2004

- I. General articles that objectively describe the killings:
 - a. AP, *Cracking down on Crime*. Houston Chronicle. July 27, 2004 [Article attached]
 - Reports on the “recent wave of killings of women and girls”
 - Short Article, similar to other APA articles stating neutral facts about the increase of killing of women and girls.
 - b. Associated Press, *Mystery Cloaks Killings of Young Women; Body Parts Found in EL Salvador Worse Slaughters in Guatemala*. Toronto Star. July 6, 2003 [Article attached]
 - Gruesome documentation of the decapitating/dismembering deaths of two young girls in San Salvador.
 - Connects these deaths to similar dismembering murders of women and girls in Guatemala.
 - Documents concern from the Guatemala Network to Oppose Violence Against Women
 - Police are “confused” regarding the cause of the murders.
 - c. Claire Marshall, *Murderers prey on Guatemalan Women*, BBC News. [available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3294659.stm>]
 - Correspondence with Sandra Zayas, a criminal investigator in Guatemala City who describes the “wave of brutal and sadistic murders” of women in Guatemala.
 - Most of the killings are of poor women all murdered in the same way: . . . abducted, tortured, raped, stabbed to death and then their bodies dumped.
 - Police have few resources to deal with the caseload of 300 cases per officer.
- II. Critical articles that offer social or governmental explanations for the killings and call for governmental action:
 - a. Dan Glaister, *Fifty Women a Month Murdered in Guatemala: Young Victims killed in Manner Reminiscent of Civil War Executions*. Guardian Foreign Pages. September 18, 2004 [Article attached]
 - Since 2001, 1,300 women have been killed in Guatemala. The government claims that the deaths are attributed to 21% domestic violence, 20% gang related, 8% drug related, 3% prostitution and 48% unknown.
 - The Guatemalan “femicide” affects primarily poor, young, indigenous women occurring primarily in poor areas of Guatemala City.
 - Tension between government officials who are blaming the deaths on “youth gang violence” while human rights officials declare the lack of international attention of the killings is due to the fact that women are “invisible” in Guatemala under the patriarchal structure of the government.

- There are few resources to mitigate the killings and only an estimated “10% of the reported assassinations have been investigated.”
- b. Sergio De Leon, *More Guatemalan Women Killed; Laws and Culture Blamed for Rise in Female Slaying*. Houston Chronicle. August 29, 2004 [Article attached]
- 300 women have been killed in the first 6 months of 2004. 250 were killed in 2003. 184 were killed in 2002.
 - 1/3 of the murders are related to domestic violence.
 - Women’s rights advocates are blaming “laws that are stacked against women, especially victims of domestic violence, and a culture that lacks respect for women.”
 - In contrast, Sandra Zayas (cited here as a Prosecutor) attributes the increase in killings of women and girls “is simply a reflection of the growing violence in Guatemala” after the civil war.
 - Suggestions to lessen the violence include hiring more prosecutors and increasing the penalties.
- c. Marion Lloyd. *Guatemala Activists Seek Justice as Women Die*. The Boston Globe. June 14, 2004 [Article attached]
- Many of the murdered women have been raped. Also states that the mutilation and murder of the women have been grotesque.
 - Murders in Guatemala have “surpassed” Ciudad Juarez Mexico.
 - There is significant governmental resistance to addressing the issue as directed violence against women. A former army general, Otto Perez Molina “denied women were being targeted”, states women are only 8% of the murders, claims that the murdered women were involved in criminal activity and attributes the violence to “street gangs”.
 - Sandra Zayas is quoted again, here saying that a large scale investigation isn’t possible. She has six investigators for the 80 murdered women’s cases in her office
 - In response to victims’ families there is also governmental resistance to investigate and sometimes won’t admit that a specific woman was the victim of murder. Some of the families suspect a “cover up”. One family member said of the public apathy that people say “‘it’s only a woman who died,’ as if they were flies”
 - Giovanna Lemus, coordinator of the Guatemalan Women’s Group states that murdered women are only linked by the graphic manner in which they are being killed. She also notes the history of civil war as leading to disposition of the violence. Lemus and other Women’s orgs are “demanding special attention” for the murders based on the way women are being killed.
- d. Jo Tuckman, *Land Where Women are Killers’ Prey: Guatemala is a Hunting Ground for Brutal Gangs Who Feel Free to Rape and Murder*. The Observer. June 6, 2004 [Article attached]
- This is one of many articles which follows a family and documents how they discovered that their daughter/wife/sister, etc was killed. Here Rosa Franco’s found out her daughter had been killed by watching the news. Her daughter “Maria Isabel had been raped, beaten, stabbed in the chest and tied up with

barbed wire before a blow to the back of her head finally killed her.”

- Reiterates the contrast of the high rate of murders and near absence of governmental attention or police investigation. States that it “seems to be getting worse...30% more women were killed in the first four months of 2004 compared with the same period last year.”
 - While the rates of male deaths are higher activists counter that the difference between the gendered murders is that “female victims are tortured before they die.”
 - Details more of the gruesome ways the women are killed “missing a chunk of flesh”, “shoulders are burnt black,” a pregnant woman and a sexually abused baby girl are “covered in bruises.”
 - There was a special police unit created in May to address the female homicides, which human rights groups note is a good start but hasn’t impacted the larger issue of unaccountability
 - Many families aren’t pursuing police action due to the fear resulting from the residuary climate of the civil war. There is also speculation that the killings are being perpetrated by “ex-soldiers in organized crime.”
- e. Susan Feris. *Killings Blamed on Lax System Victim’s kin accuse Guatemala of Ignoring Violence Against Women*. The Atlanta Journal – Constitution. May 30, 2004 [Article attached]
- Less than 3% of Guatemala’s murders are solved.
 - Estimates the killings at 3 per day and links the increased killings to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Families of victims in both Mexico and Guatemala state that police are “overwhelmed, intimidated or don’t care.”
 - Domestic abuse is “rampant” accounting for 20,000 cases reported in 2003.
 - Giovanna Lemus is noted again asking for international attention “by requesting probe by the UN and the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.”
 - U.S. AID has “invested \$11 million” in the past six years in an attempt to “improve the court system, strengthen police and prosecutor coordination, and reform legal education.”
 - Jane Fonda and “other activists” trying to bring attention to the murders
- f. (No Author Cited), *Fonda Denounces Murders of Women*. Caribbean Update. January 1, 2004 [Article attached]
- Focuses on Jane Fondas denunciation of the murders in Guatemala. Links Fonda to Even Ensler, V-Day and other organizations dedicated to eradicating violence against women.
- g. (No Author Cited), V-Day News Alert. *Jane Fonda visits Guatemala to put spotlight on murders of women in Guatemala*. December 8, 2003 [available at: <http://www.vday.org/contents/vday/press/media/0312081>.]
- V-Day is an organization founded by Eve Ensler who wrote the Vagina Monologues. V-Day is a global movement to stop violence against women and girls.

- Jane Fonda, and actor, V-Day activist and council member, was invited to Guatemala with an independent journalist, Marielos Monson, to help raise attention of the killings in Guatemala. Fonda had presented Monzon with the “Courage in the Media Award” for Monzon’s bravery “having risked her life to report the truth about war, political corruption, human rights abuses and genocide.”
 - Fonda met with 22 Guatemalan human rights and women’s activist and plans to return with “an army of V-Day activists” to bring attention to the femicide.
 - There is a V-Day trip to Guatemala currently being planned, though there is no mention of when.
 - In February Eve Ensler and others went to Juarez “to demand justice and also to honor and celebrate the women of Juarez and their families.”
- h. (No Author Cited) The Americas: It’s time to put an end to violence against women. Amnesty International. November 25, 2003 [available at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR010132003?open&of=ENG-GTMckissues/0401301>]
- This is a report on the Americas, not focusing on Guatemala, however the killings in Guatemala are noted under a section on violence against women in the community.
 - Quotes an unnamed Human Rights Prosecutor as saying that the killers seem to be using “the same modus operandi” and suggests that the killers are members of the maras, clandestine, and members of organized crime and drug crimes.
- III. Articles that expressly link the killings in Guatemala to the killings of women in Mexico.
- a. Diego Cevallos, *Guatemala: ‘Femicide’ Grows, With 1,300 Women Murdered Since 2001*. Inter Press Service. July 6, 2004 [Article attached]
- Implicates “police and judicial authorities” in the killings in Guatemala.
 - Estimates one killing per day, including domestic violence deaths.
 - Guatemalan Human rights activists are calling the deaths “femicide” which is defined as “killing or murder of women that occurs because the victim is a woman.”
 - Perpetrators, who are strangling, shooting, stabbing and mutilating their victims, are not being brought to justice.
 - Absence in public safety attributed to the lacking law enforcement.
 - The gangs on whom many of the murders are blamed are called “Maras”
 - The UN and “several international human rights groups” are focusing attention on Guatemala, however more attention is going to Ciudad Mexico, which borders the USA. Even though Guatemala’s numbers and rates of killings are higher they are “being hushed up,” said Hilda Morales of Guatemala’s Non-Violence network.
 - Concern from activists and human rights groups that government will continue to make empty promises

- b. (No Author Cited) *Guatemala: Focus on Femicide Misses Broader Picture*. Latin American Weekly Report. June 1, 2004 [Article attached]
- Amnesty International visited Guatemala in May in response to accusations of government failure to investigate and prosecute the murders of women.
 - Jane Fonda “set the ball in motion” in December by promising to organize “an army to stand beside Guatemalan Women” to show the world what was happening. Fonda was joined by Yakin Erturk, UN’s special rapporteur on violence against women.
 - States that women account for 35% of all murders.
 - Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) reported low estimates of women murdered: 46 in the first four months of 2004. A later report put the figure at 178 in five months
 - NGO Casa Alianza called Guatemala City the “most violence city in central America” which reported more murders than “Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica” combined.
 - Casa Alianza expressed primary concern for the number of minors (as opposed to the number of women) who are killed.
 - Points to the “maras” as well as “clandestine groups” who are linked to state agencies and claims that their murders might be spurred by “social cleansing.”
- c. (No Author Cited), *Guatemala and Mexico: Brutal Murders of Women Continue*. NACLA Report on the Americas. January 1, 2004 [Article attached]
- States that over 700 Guatemalan women have been killed since 2001.
 - Calls the murders “motiveless.”
 - Authorities suggest that the “maras” are responsible for the murders but there are fewer arrests and no hard evidence.
 - Notes Jane Fonda’s involvement.
 - Jose Luis Soberanes, President of Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission presented a report to Congress “blasting Chihuahua prosecutors and police agents for ‘serious omissions, irregularities and crimes’ in their investigation” of the murders.
 - States that both the Guatemalan and Mexican government have been unable to solve the murders. Notes that there have been 300 young women killed in Mexico over the last 100 years and over than 700 in Guatemala in the last 3 years.
- IV. United Nations Development Fund for Women, *Gender Profile of the Conflict in Guatemala* [available at: <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/guatemala/guatemala.htm#unifem>]
- Many of the attached news articles reference the history and social climate in Guatemala and this is a comprehensive description of how the social and political changes in Guatemala have impacted women. In particular the section titled “The Impact of the Conflict on Guatemalan Women” has a subsection: “Impact on Human Rights, Including Violence Against Women” which is particularly relevant.
 - Provides history for gender-based violence before the recent rise in femicide. Noting, in particular that “pregnant women had their wombs split open before being killed and many women and girls were raped before being killed.

- While men and women are both being killed, women are the victims of “99% of the sexual violations.”

The Houston Chronicle July 27, 2004, Tuesday

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July 27, 2004, Tuesday 3 STAR EDITION

SECTION: A; Pg. 14

LENGTH: 67 words

HEADLINE: **Cracking down on crime**

SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS

BODY:

GUATEMALA ordered 1,600 soldiers onto the streets of the capital, Guatemala City, on Monday to try to rein in a wave of violent crime. Almost 2,000 people have been murdered in Guatemala this year, making it one of the most violent countries in Latin America. A recent wave of killings of women and girls has shocked even crime-hardened Guatemalans and put pressure on the government to respond.

GRAPHIC: Photo: GUATEMALA ordered 1,600 soldiers onto the streets of the capital, Guatemala City, on Monday to try to rein in a wave of violent crime. Almost 2,000 people have been murdered in Guatemala this year, making it one of the most violent countries in Latin America. A recent wave of killings of women and girls has shocked even crime-hardened Guatemalans and put pressure on the government to respond.; ASSOCIATED PRESS

TYPE: Photo

LOAD-DATE: July 27, 2004

The Guardian (London) - Final Edition September 18, 2004

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The Guardian (London) - Final Edition

September 18, 2004

SECTION: Guardian Foreign Pages, Pg. 18

LENGTH: 677 words

HEADLINE: **Fifty women a month murdered in Guatemala:** Young victims killed in manner reminiscent of civil war executions

BYLINE: Dan Glaister, in Los Angeles

BODY:

More than 350 women have been murdered in Guatemala this year, placing the central American state at the centre of alarm over so-called femicide.

Most of the Guatemalan killings have taken place in poor areas of the capital, Guatemala City, but there have also been clusters of deaths in the east and south of the country. The number of murders average at 50 a month.

The victims are primarily aged between 16 and 35, most are poor, and many are members of the country's indigenous population.

While the government has sought to blame the deaths on youth gang violence, local human rights campaigners argue that the scale and methods suggest otherwise.

"Violence against women today has reached an extreme level," said Jose Flores, a spokesman for Guatemala's human rights commission. "Many of the methods involved in the killings - torture, coups de grace to the back of the neck, all the techniques of extra-judicial executions - stem from the practices of recent years," he said, in a reference to the murders that characterised the country's protracted civil war between 1960 and 1996. A truth commission reported that about 200,000 civilians, mainly Mayan Indians, were killed during that time.

This week Susana Villaran, the former Peruvian minister of women's affairs, visited Guatemala in her capacity as the Organisation of American States' special observer for human rights.

Declaring the situation "alarming" and "delicate", she held talks with the president, Oscar Berger, and leading legislators and human rights campaigners.

After meeting Ms Villaran at the start of the week the president said she had been "very optimistic about the subject of violence against women, and she looked very favourably upon the efforts of the government to restructure the security forces".

But a visit to a special police unit set up to investigate the killings led the special observer to warn Mr Berger and his government to take the situation more seriously if they

hoped to reduce the killings. The police unit, based in the capital, has only 15 officers, two computers, one car and one mobile telephone.

According to Mr Flores, only 10% of the reported assassinations have been investigated.

The killings are part of a pattern of violence over the past three years. Since 2001, 1,300 women have been murdered in Guatemala.

This year has seen a precipitous increase from last year's total of 383. "We now have a spiral of assassinations against women," Ms Villaran said on Tuesday.

She urged the government to reinforce the legal system and provide more comprehensive aid to women. "You can't just look at this problem in terms of the number of corpses that appear each day," she said on Wednesday.

The night before, two more teenage girls had been murdered: Berta Monroy, 15, was shot in the capital as punishment for trying to leave a local gang, police sources said; in Retalhule in the south 17-year-old Silvia Hernandez was shot and killed.

Those two murders are thought to have brought the total of deaths so far this year to 354.

Government officials claim that 21% of the deaths this year were the product of domestic violence, 20% were gang-related, 8% had a connection to the drugs trade, and 3% to prostitution. The cause of the remaining 48% is unknown.

Mr Flores said racism and discrimination were likely motives behind some of the killings. "There is a very macho attitude towards women," he said. "Social exclusion is an issue, as is sexual violence and torture. Some of the killers may have links to organised crime - to drug trafficking - but that is not the main reason."

Yovana Lemus of the National Commission for the Prevention of Inter-family Violence told the AFP news agency that the situation in Guatemala had not attracted international attention before because women remained "invisible in every sphere in this country, mainly due to the patriarchal system".

Ms Villaran's presence, she said, would allow the country to "bring the monster out into the open".

LOAD-DATE: September 19, 2004

The Boston Globe, June 14, 2004

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June 14, 2004, Monday ,THIRD EDITION
Correction Appended

SECTION: NATIONAL/FOREIGN; Pg. A1

LENGTH: 977 words

HEADLINE: GUATEMALA ACTIVISTS SEEK JUSTICE AS WOMEN DIE

BYLINE: By Marion Lloyd, Globe Correspondent

BODY:

[PUBLISHED CORRECTION - DATE: Tuesday, June 15, 2004

GUATEMALA CITY At a rate of more than one a day, the mutilated bodies of Guatemalan women are turning up on roadsides and in dumpsters. Some have been decapitated with butcher knives. Others have been strangled or burned beyond recognition. Many have been raped.

Since January 2002, 1,183 Guatemalan women [SEE CORRECTION ABOVE] have been murdered, many in unspeakable ways. And nobody knows why. "The only link is the ways in which they were killed," said Giovanna Lemus, coordinator of the Guatemalan Women's Group, one of several activist groups that have been pressuring the government to give priority to solving the murders.

Lemus believes the violence is a legacy of the country's 1960-1996 civil war, when both sides committed horrific atrocities. "If you analyze the types of violence in the armed conflict, they are the same," she said. Less than 5 percent of all murders are solved in Guatemala, which lacks a specialized homicide squad, officials say.

Police have arrested only 11 suspects in connection with the murders of 360 women last year, according to a report released last month by the Attorney General's Office for Human Rights, which acts as the country's ombudsman. Lemus's group counted 383 murdered during that period, based on police figures and newspaper reports.

But "the authorities don't want to accept that," she said.

The number of victims had surpassed that of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, where the killings of more than 300 women over the past decade have captured world attention. Guatemalan officials, however, continue to downplay the violence, despite evidence that the number of killings are on the rise.

Otto Perez Molina, a former army general who was the country's top security official until last month, denied that women were being targeted. He said in an interview that many of the victims had ties to street gangs, which, together with drug operations, are blamed for a general rise in violence in Guatemala since the late 1990s. Officials cite police figures

showing women account for 8 percent of all murders.

But Lemus and other women's rights activists argue that while the female victims are a minority, the ways in which they are being killed demand special attention.

"You don't see male victims looking like that," Lemus said, displaying a gruesome collection of photos of the crime scenes to make her point. "They don't cut them up in pieces like they do the women." Specialists offer no conclusive explanations why such brutality is directed against women.

In one of the most shocking cases, the dismembered bodies of two sisters, ages 11 and 14, were found crammed in an oil barrel last June. The older girl had apparently been killed for spurning a gang-member boyfriend.

Government critics in particular, the victims' family members dispute the allegation that most of the murdered women were involved in criminal activities. tary at a mechanics shop to put herself through school, and volunteered with handicapped people in her spare time.

Two days after Peralta disappeared from the University of San Carlos, where she was a third-year accounting student, her mutilated body turned up in a government morgue. She had been stabbed 48 times and her attackers had apparently tried to cut off her head.

Police closed the case months later, citing lack of evidence. Since then, the family has lobbied tirelessly to get to the bottom of Peralta's murder, gaining an inside view of the country's corrupt criminal justice system.

Even worse for her family, the government now refuses to accept that Nancy Peralta died. In February, two years after her father and brother identified her corpse at the government morgue, police informed the family that Peralta had enrolled for the spring semester at the university. The news fueled the family's suspicions that university students participated in the murder and have since collaborated with police to cover it up.

Veliz, a dark-haired beauty who dreamed of becoming a pilot, disappeared from the clothing shop where she worked in December 2001. Two days later, her mother learned of her daughter's death from the television news. She had been strangled with barbed wire and her skull was crushed. She had also been stabbed, her mother said.

"Nobody deserves to die like that, much less someone who was just beginning life," said Sandoval, sobbing in her tiny living room in downtown Guatemala City. Photos of Veliz in a shimmering white gown at her 15th birthday party hang in the cramped apartment, along with her Barbie dolls and stuffed animals, with which she had played even as a teenager.

"People say, 'it's only a woman who died,' as if they were flies," said Sandoval, who said she tried to kill herself and then suffered a heart attack after her daughter's murder.

But her sorrow has turned to anger over the failure of the authorities to act in the case. She said police investigators had dismissed several obvious leads, including eyewitness descriptions of her daughter's likely kidnapper and records of the calls made on her

cellphone the day the teenager disappeared.
Police officials say they lack the tools to pursue every case.

"It's just not possible," said Sandra Zayas, the government's special prosecutor for crimes against women. She has a staff of six investigators to follow the roughly 80 women's murder cases her office has taken on so far, in addition to dozens of cases of adoption-related crimes, she said. Her agency was set up in 1997 to deal primarily with sexual abuse cases and has no offices outside Guatemala City.

Zayas said she believed street gangs were responsible for the most gruesome killings, and that there was little evidence that police were involved.

CORRECTION:

Because of a reporting error, yesterday's Page One story about violence against women in Guatemala should have stated that more than 1,183 women have been killed since January 2002, and should have attributed that figure to various women's advocacy groups. Also, the mother of one victim should have been identified as Rosa Franco Sandoval, not as Rosa Sandoval.

GRAPHIC: PHOTO MAP , Rosa Sandoval [SEE CORRECTION ABOVE] expressed the pain she has faced in seeking justice in the murder of her 16-year-old daughter / Globe Photo / Sarah Martone

LOAD-DATE: June 15, 2004

NACLA Report on the Americas January 1, 2004
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January 1, 2004

SECTION: No. 4, Vol. 37; Pg. 46; ISSN: 1071-4839

IAC-ACC-NO: 113237521

LENGTH: 263 words

HEADLINE: **Guatemala and Mexico: brutal murders of women continue;** In Brief;
Brief Article

BODY:

Since 2001, more than 700 Guatemalan women have been murdered, with more than 270 reported this year alone. One of the more disturbing aspects of the wave of killings is that the murders appear to be motiveless with all the victims being killed in the same manner: abducted, tortured, raped and then stabbed to death.

Actress Jane Fonda recently traveled to **Guatemala** in an attempt to bring attention to the killings. She promised to return with an "army" of women activists if the authorities didn't do more to stop the murders. "You have even more women killed than in Ciudad Juarez," said Fonda. An average of four, young and mostly poor, women are being killed every week. Authorities have suggested that street gangs, known locally as "maras," are responsible for the murders, but have not been able to provide any hard evidence to support their claims. Despite several arrests of suspects, the killings go on unabated.

In Ciudad Juarez, where at least 300 young women have been killed in the past ten years, police have also been unable to solve the murders. The president of Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, Jose Luis Soberanes, presented Congress with a report on November 24 blasting Chihuahua prosecutors and police agents for "serious omissions, irregularities and crimes" in their investigation into the murders. Of the 263 officially acknowledged murders, investigations have been halted in 155. In 47 cases the investigators have "gone to the extreme of subjecting the victims' families to a polygraph exam," the report noted.

--NACLA

IAC-CREATE-DATE: February 17, 2004

LOAD-DATE: February 18, 2004

IPS-Inter Press Service, July 5, 2004

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IPS-Inter Press Service

July 5, 2004, Monday

LENGTH: 839 words

HEADLINE: GUATEMALA: 'FEMICIDE' GROWS, WITH 1,300 WOMEN MURDERED SINCE 2001

BYLINE: By Diego Cevallos

DATELINE: MEXICO CITY, Jul. 5, 2004

BODY:

Much attention has been given to the case of Mexico's Ciudad Juarez, where more than 300 young women have been murdered over the past decade.

But there is little awareness that in neighbouring Guatemala, 1,300 women have been killed since 2001.

In an interview with IPS, Nobel Peace laureate Rigoberta Mencho said police and judicial authorities are implicated in some of the killings in Guatemala, where one woman a day is killed on average, including victims of domestic violence, but mainly the deaths resulting from criminal murder.

The "femicide", as the Guatemalan indigenous human rights activist described the killings, is documented by official statistics, which report some 1,300 cases since 2001. Femicide is gender-related homicide, defined as the killing or murder of women that occurs because the victim is a woman.

The victims in Guatemala, most of whom come from poor segments of society, have been strangled, shot, stabbed or mutilated, while most of their killers are never brought to justice or even identified.

Of the 383 cases reported in 2003, only 77 were clarified. "There is appalling impunity," said Mencho, who described the murderers as "pitiless, sick people." So far this year, 230 women have died violent deaths in Guatemala. Many of their bodies were found in garbage dumps or remote rural areas, or simply left on the streets.

"The state is absent in Guatemala, because although it is responsible for public safety, it lacks the law enforcement mechanisms to prevent or clarify the murders of women," Patricia Pinto, a member of the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights and the Collective for the Defence of Women in Guatemala, told IPS.

Adequate police investigation systems do not exist in the impoverished Central American country of 12 million, where impunity reigns, said the activist.

Pinto pointed out that of the 19,000 reports of domestic violence received by prosecutors in 2002, just 10 were fully resolved in favour of the women reporting the violence.

Although the conservative Guatemalan government of President Oscar Berger, in office since January, says it is concerned about the country's rising crime rates, "all we hear are expressions of concern and promises that this and that" commission or other mechanism will be created, and no tangible results have yet been seen, she maintained.

Guatemala's National Civil Police created a special unit to deal with the homicides of women, but it has not yet come up with significant results, she added.

According to the police, 21 percent of the murders of women are gang-related -- youth gangs, known as 'maras', are a growing problem in Central American countries -- another 21 percent are the result of armed robbery, and the rest are "crimes of passion" or the result of drug-related violence and rape.

"I believe the murders of so many women is one of the echoes of the civil war that my country experienced, which left very deep imprints of violence and resentment," said Mencho.

Between 1960 and 1996, Guatemala was torn by a civil war between the U.S.-backed security forces and guerrilla insurgents. According to a "truth commission" report, the army was responsible for the deaths of most of the 200,000 civilians, mainly rural Mayan Indians, who were killed in the war.

Both Mencho and Pinto urged the Berger administration and the Guatemalan justice system to carry out an in-depth review of the way the violence against women has been handled, and to come up with concrete actions to stop the "femicide".

Although the magnitude of the problem has drawn the attention of the United Nations and several international human rights groups, high-profile cases like Ciudad Juarez in northern Mexico, on the border with the United States, where most of the 300 young women killed over the past decade had been previously raped, have received more attention.

In Guatemala, however, 383 women were killed in 2003 alone. "Everyone knows about the murdered women of Ciudad Juarez, but it's as if the case of the murdered women of Guatemala were being hushed up," said Hilda Morales with Guatemala's Non-Violence network.

When U.N. special rapporteur on violence against women Yakin Erturk visited Guatemala in February, she expressed alarm at the murders, describing them as atrocious, and saying that most of the victims were raped, sexually assaulted and mutilated.

To confront the wave of violent crime, reflected by a 14.3 percent rise in the number of homicides between 2002 and 2003, President Berger promised to purge the police force of criminal elements, which were brought to public attention after a spate of robberies.

He also pledged that women who report cases of violence would receive improved treatment by the justice system.

But activists are not confident that things will improve. "There have been many promises,

but now it is time to curb the violence and protect women," said Mencho.

LOAD-DATE: July 6, 2004

Latin American Weekly Report June 1, 2004 Tuesday

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Latin American Weekly Report

June 1, 2004 Tuesday

LENGTH: 627 words

HEADLINE: GUATEMALA: Focus on femicide misses broader picture

BODY:

When an Amnesty International team visited Guatemala in late May, the human rights committee of the Guatemalan congress told them that 200 women had been murdered in the country since the beginning of the year. Days earlier, the country's human rights procurator, Sergio Morales, accused the authorities of negligence for failing to investigate the hundreds of murders that took place last year. As in the case of Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, femicide in Guatemala is becoming the focus of international attention.

The ball was set in motion in December last year when the US actress Jane Fonda turned up and promised to organise an army to stand beside Guatemalan women to say to the world what is going on here'. She noted that the bodies of 700 women had been found in Guatemala since 2000, and 270 since the beginning of 2003. You have even more women killed than in Ciudad Juarez,' she said. She was followed in January by Yakin Erturk, the UN's special rapporteur on violence against women, while local NGOs produced masses of data on the subject. The Red de la No Violencia contra la Mujer reported that the number of femicides had been steadily increasing: 283 in 2001, 317 in 2002, 358 in 2003. The office of the human-rights procurator, PDH, actually tallied 383 femicides in 2003, and said that only 10% had been fully investigated. This year the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) reported at least' 46 murders of women in the first four months. The official figures put out by the national police were actually grimmer than that: they show 178 femicides up to 19 May, which suggests that ven though they are not solving these cases, they are at least taking note of them.

The issue in perspective

As in the case of Ciudad Juarez, which is far from having the highest rate of femicides in Mexico, what is lacking in respect of Guatemala is perspective. This year murders of women have accounted for 35% of all murders - in a country where women accounting for slightly more than 50% of the population. The largest number of femicides (41% of the total, according to the PDH) take place in the capital, Guatemala City, which the NGO Casa Alianza described as the most violent city in Central America. In the department of Guatemala,' it said in a report released in early May, more murders are reported that in Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica taken together.' Last year in Guatemala City, notes Casa Alianza, there were 747 extrajudicial executions' - a type of crime that has a resolution rate lower than that of femicides - while in the whole of Honduras 557 cases were reported. Casa Alianza is more worried by the high proportion of minors among the victims of violent crime than that of women.

Congresswoman Nineth Montenegro, who chairs the human rights committee, told the AI team that in most cases of femicide, the victims were raped before being shot dead. This echoes the GAM report, which says that all 46 of its reported cases of femicide this year involved kidnapping, torture and rape. The PDH report makes a far less sweeping claim: it says that occasionally the bodies have been mutilated and objects of torture and rape'. In the case of Ciudad Juarez, the rape element continues to be cited even after reliable statistics have shown that it was not a dominant feature of femicides there.

According to the PDH, the causes of these crimes are to be found in common crime, the activities of the street gangs known as maras, and social cleansing' conducted by clandestine groups linked directly or indirectly with state agencies'. The latter are now the target of an investigation by a special UN-led commission. The causes identified by the PDH are roughly the same as those for homicides generally in Guatemala.

LOAD-DATE: June 3, 2004

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution May 30, 2004 Sunday

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May 30, 2004 Sunday Home Edition

SECTION: News; Pg. 5B

LENGTH: 662 words

HEADLINE: Killings blamed on lax system;
Victims' kin accuse Guatemala of ignoring violence against women.

BYLINE: SUSAN FERRISS

SOURCE: Cox International Correspondent

BODY:

Guatemala City --- They were impoverished and middle-class women, students, mothers, shop and factory workers. And since 2001, more than 1,180 of them have been killed in unspeakable ways.

Now the victims' relatives share the torment of navigating a justice system that even those who work in it admit is failing.

Less than a decade after a 1996 peace accord ended three decades of civil war, the small Central American country of Guatemala is struggling with a violent crime wave that includes a surge in killings of women and girls.

In 2001, an estimated 303 women were murdered. The number rose to 317 in 2002 and to 383 in 2003.

Through April of this year, about 180 women had been killed, about the same number as for all of 2000, says Sergio Fernando Morales, the top human rights official in

Guatemala.

By many counts, fewer than 3 percent of murders are ever solved in Guatemala, a country of 14 million people.

The increase in the killings of women recalls the hundreds of slayings of women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, over the last decade. As in Ciudad Juarez, victims' families in Guatemala complain that investigators are overwhelmed, intimidated or don't care.

"Some prosecutors don't have the will to investigate," said Sandra Zayas, a special prosecutor whose job is to investigate sex crimes and crimes against children in Guatemala City.

Last year Zayas took on 30 murder cases with female victims, mostly involving rape and mutilation or multiple gangland-style slayings. This year, she agreed to add 50 more, some of them cases on which regular prosecutors had made no progress.

Of the 30 cases last year, Zayas successfully ordered arrests in four that are about to go to trial.

On top of murder cases, her six assistants and six investigators are responsible for 240 cases related to trafficking in children. The investigators have only one vehicle to use in their work.

"I have told my people, I fear that these cases are getting out of control now. I'm not sure we realize the magnitude of what we're dealing with," Zayas said.

The women who have been killed are often strangled, burned, mutilated by knives or machetes, or shot. Zayas is prosecuting several gang youths accused of raping two sisters, 14 and 11, and cutting them into pieces because the elder girl spurned one of the gang members.

Rampant domestic abuse --- 20,000 reported cases last year --- also contributes to the toll among women.

"Lately we have seen two or three killings a day," said Giovanna Lemus of the Guatemalan No Violence Against Women Network.

The network has tried to draw international attention to the killings by requesting probes by the United Nations and the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. Jane Fonda and other activists traveled to Guatemala to spotlight the murders.

Guatemala is a nation of extreme inequality --- 57 percent of the people are poor --- with a harsh legacy of violence and impunity. More than 200,000 people died during the civil war.

Thousands are still missing and thousands were massacred during the 1980s, when the U.S.-backed army unleashed a brutal counterinsurgency campaign to root out support for leftist guerrillas.

"Sometimes we compare these murders to the armed conflict. What has changed? Nothing. We just have it in the city now rather than out in the countryside," said Ileana

Peralta, 21, whose sister Nancy, a student at Guatemala City's San Carlos University, was killed in February 2002

Ileana Peralta and her sister Maria Elena have relentlessly pressured investigators to check into suspicious activity at the university.

The U.S. Agency for International Development is investing in projects for rural development and improved justice in Guatemala. U.S. AID has invested more than \$11 million over the last six years to improve the court system, strengthen police and prosecutor coordination, and reform legal education.

GRAPHIC: Photo: Maria Elena Peralta, a government critic, holds a photo with a double image of her sister Nancy, who was slain in 2002. / SUSAN FERRISS / Staff

LOAD-DATE: May 30, 2004

The Observer, June 6, 2004

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June 6, 2004

SECTION: Observer News Pages, Pg. 26

LENGTH: 777 words

HEADLINE: Land where women are killers' prey: Guatemala is a hunting ground for brutal gangs who feel free to rape and murder

BYLINE: Jo Tuckman, Guatemala City

BODY:

ROSA FRANCO'S hopes of finding her missing daughter alive vanished the instant she switched on the evening news. There, on her TV, was the body of the teenager lying face down in a ditch.

But the full horror of the murder was only revealed when she got to the mortuary. Maria Isabel had been raped, beaten, stabbed in the chest and tied up with barbed wire before a blow to the back of her head finally killed her. 'Nobody deserves that, still less somebody who was just starting to live,' she said.

Such murders have become common in Guatemala, where there are now daily reports of killings but rarely news of any arrests. Now, in a new report, the country's human rights ombudsman, Sergio Morales, has found that 424 women were murdered last year, but only 22 of these cases were being seriously investigated. 'The only thing proved so far is that these murders have one common denominator: impunity,' he told reporters.

Such unchecked misogyny, with no clear motive, is reminiscent of the situation in Ciudad Juarez, the Mexican city just over the border from Texas where around 100 serial-type sexual murders over the last decade have become an international cause celebre. In Guatemala, there is as yet little evidence of 'profile' killings, but the huge numbers of victims, and the brutality involved, indicate that this too is no ordinary crime problem.

And it seems to be getting worse. According to police figures, 30 per cent more women were killed here in the first four months of 2004 compared with the same period last year, while the number of male victims fell by 8 per cent. There were still nearly six times more men killed than women, but activists insist this statistic does not tell the whole story because a large number of the female victims are tortured before they die.

Giovanna Lemus of the Guatemalan Network Against Violence Against Women has pictures of the dead on her computer. One is missing a chunk of flesh from her thigh; another's shoulders are burnt black; a third, a pregnant woman, is covered in bruises, as is a sexually abused baby girl. 'They (male murder victims) don't turn up like this,' the activist says. Lemus dates the phenomenon to the late Nineties, although it has only become a major political issue in the past few months - in part because of rising international concern.

Under pressure to respond, Guatemala's national police chief said earlier this year that half the murders could be blamed on feuds within the ultra-violent street gangs known as *maras*. This month the country's Minister of the Interior put more emphasis on deaths due to domestic violence. Neither explanation satisfies the human rights ombudsman's office, which claims to have found police involvement in several cases.

Deputy ombudsman Maria Eugenia Morales said that any officers committing such crimes may have links to powerful criminal organisations intent on showing they are untouchable. 'In a climate of the high levels of crime we have in Guatemala, it isn't enough to eliminate the victim. They (the criminal groups) also want to transmit the message that they have power,' she said.

For many, the brutality recalls Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war, which, according to a UN-sponsored commission, killed 200,000 people before peace accords were signed eight years ago.

Most of the victims were Maya Indians, massacred by the army, often with great savagery, as a warning against sympathising with left-wing guerrillas.

'It is like it was in the war years - only now it isn't happening in the countryside, it is in the city,' says Lilian Peralta, whose sister was found dead in February 2002. Nancy Peralta was raped and stabbed 48 times.

The suspicion that ex-soldiers in organised crime could be involved in the killings is unproved, but human rights activists say the legacy of war explains the climate of fear that keeps most victims' families from pushing for progress from the authorities. The Peralta family and Rosa Franco are among the exceptions to that rule, although they all believe they have been followed on several occasions.

Sandra Zayas, Guatemala's special prosecutor for crimes against women, insists that her office is doing all it can but is hampered by inadequate resources. They had their first success last week when three members of the Salvatrucha *mara* were jailed for 50 years each for raping and killing two women.

Human rights observers have welcomed the sentence and the creation of a police unit a month ago dedicated to female homicides, but insist that neither yet represents a significant dent in the prevailing climate of impunity.

LOAD-DATE: June 7, 2004

The Houston Chronicle August 29, 2004, Sunday

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August 29, 2004, Sunday 2 STAR EDITION

SECTION: A; Pg. 24

LENGTH: 387 words

HEADLINE: More Guatemalan women killed;
Laws and culture blamed for rise in female slayings

SOURCE: Associated Press

BYLINE: SERGIO DE LEON

DATELINE: GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA

BODY:

GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA - Some are victims of gangs, others of domestic abuse. Many are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

More than 300 women have been killed in Guatemala since January, compared with 250 killed in all of 2003 and 184 in 2002, according to local media and the National Statistical Institute.

United Nations representatives visited last year and expressed concern. Women in both Guatemala and Mexico have called on the government to stop the violence.

The killings may appear random, but women's rights advocates also blame laws that are stacked against women, especially victims of domestic violence, and a culture that lacks respect for women.

"The form of expression is rage and hate," said Andrea Barrios, of Guatemala's Legal Action Center for Human Rights. The women "have been tortured, raped, mistreated."

Prosecutor Sandra Zayas said many women are killed by people they know, such as spouses or boyfriends they have previously reported to police for abuse.

Women abused by someone they know can get no physical police protection. Women's rights advocates have long demanded a change in the law so that offenders can be put in jail.

Nearly a third of all female homicides in Guatemala City are related to domestic violence.

Carolina Claveria was fatally shot in January, and left to die in a fast-food restaurant bathroom. Her ex-boyfriend, who had been in trouble for attacking her before, was arrested.

Zayas argues the overall spike in female killings is simply a reflection of the growing violence in Guatemala, where people in small towns often take the law into their own hands and a culture of violence still persists eight years after the end of 36 years of civil war.

One recent victim, 20-year-old Brenda Garcia, was found fatally shot on Aug. 3 in front of the factory where she worked as a secretary. Police have no idea why she was killed.

Officials hope to slow the violence by appointing more prosecutors. Right now, 10 attorneys handle a monthly average of 1,500 cases of crimes against women - from homicide to assault.

Others say penalties must be increased. Rosa Franco, whose 17-year-old daughter was tortured, raped and killed in 2001, refuses to stop fighting for justice.

The killers "should go to jail, for at least 50 years," she said.

GRAPHIC: Photo: ANOTHER VICTIM: Relatives carry the coffin of Rosmary Mejia, 16, killed while walking from her school to her house in a Guatemala City neighborhood. She is one of more than 300 women killed since January in a growing tide of violence against women in Guatemala.; RODRIGO ABD: ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOAD-DATE: August 29, 2004

The Toronto Star July 6, 2003 Sunday

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The Toronto Star
July 6, 2003 Sunday Ontario Edition

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A07

LENGTH: 344 words

HEADLINE: Mystery cloaks killings of young women

BYLINE: Associated Press

HIGHLIGHT:

Body parts found in El Salvador Worse slaughters in Guatemala

BODY:

The decapitated heads of two young women were tossed off a highway near a police station in the Salvadoran capital Friday, the latest in a series of gruesome dismemberment killings that have shocked El Salvador and neighbouring Guatemala.

The still-bleeding heads of the two women, who police said were probably between 15 and 20 years old, rolled down an embankment on the outskirts of San Salvador.

The heads came to rest about five metres from the parking lot of a police station 12 kilometres southeast of the capital.

Police did not know whether the killers planned for the remains to wind up there.

"It appears they were decapitated just before arriving at the spot, because ... (the heads) were still losing blood," said Francisco Parada, assistant commissioner of the national police.

"We are investigating to see whether the bodies turn up in some other part of the country."

The heads were taken to a morgue for examination by experts from the Forensic Medical Institute.

El Salvador has recorded a half-dozen instances since November in which body parts, mainly female, have turned up.

In neighbouring Guatemala, the situation is even more chilling; 158 women have been killed there in the first three months of this year. And more women have now turned up dead and dismembered.

On Thursday, a Guatemalan group, the Network to Oppose Violence Against Women, called on authorities to bring an end to the killings, noting they had become increasingly gruesome.

This week, three legs, a head and an arm were found in the town San Pedro Ayampuc, near the capital Guatemala City.

Medical examiners were studying them to see if they match the dismembered thoraxes of two girls found yesterday. The trunks of the girls - about 16 and 11 years old - were found some 20 kilometres north of the capital, near San Pedro.

Interior Minister Adolfo Reyes said he thought the crimes were part of "satanic

sacrifices." Neighbours said they suspect gang members in the deaths.
El Salvador and Guatemala are plagued by street gangs.

LOAD-DATE: July 6, 2003

1/1/04 Caribbean Update (Pg. Unavail. Online)
2004 WLNR 6601744

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January 1, 2004

Volume 19; Issue 12

FONDA DENOUNCES MURDERS OF WOMEN.

Jane Fonda promised to bring a small "army" of women to Guatemala to denounce the murders of about 700 women in the past three years in this crime-plagued nation, reports AP (Dec. 1, 2003). The 66-year-old actor was visiting Guatemala City on behalf of the nonprofit organization V-Day. The group is led by Vagina Monologues playwright Eve Ensler and campaigns around the world to halt violence against women. Fonda said she'd organize an "army to stand beside Guatemalan women to say to the world what is going on here." Fonda said she would return after the U.S. presidential elections in Nov. 2004 with a group of activists, mainly from the V-Day organization, to pressure the Guatemalan government do something about the killings. The bodies of about 700 women have been found in Guatemala since 2000. Some 270 bodies have been found so far this year, Fonda said. Most were victims of gang violence, rapes and other crime. Guatemala has experienced spiralling crime, especially gang violence, since the end of its 36-year civil war in 1996. Fonda said domestic violence is also a problem with 20,000 complaints filed annually in Guatemala.

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---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

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